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The CIA's Scholarly Admiral

President Carter's choice of Admiral Stansfield Turner to head the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) seems as certain to be applauded as his first pick, Theodore C. Sorensen, was controversial.

Mr. Sorensen, a pacifist who had been President Kennedy's right-hand man, withdrew from consideration for the CIA directorship after it became evident that he would gain a mixed Senate endorsement at best. Key Senators disposed toward him concluded that he should withdraw because he would be unlikely to win the confidence of the military community and might be regarded skeptically by foreign intelligence agencies following his admission that he used classified documents in writing his history of the Kennedy Administration.

Admiral Turner, who currently is commander of allied forces in Southern Europe, does not bring Mr. Sorensen's handicaps to the nomination. He could undergo some close questioning and collect some no votes from Senators dubious about any military man's heading the CIA. But the Senate is all but certain to confirm the Navy's own judgment of Admiral Turner as a supe-

rior blend of scholarship and leadership.

Indeed, Admiral Turner seems almost too good to be true. He and President Carter were classmates at the Naval Academy, and he enjoys Mr. Carter's respect and trust. The President was 59th in the Class of '46; Admiral Turner was 25th. He later became a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University (M.A. 1950). His brilliant academic career presaged a swift rise in the Navy—he ascended from ensign in 1946 to full admiral in 1975, the second post-World War II Annapolis graduate to achieve top rank. He had a sea command in Vietnam waters during the Vietnam War and commanded a carrier task group in the Mediterranean in 1971-72 when the Soviet Navy pressed its buildup there. He served for a while as director of the systems analysis division of the Office of Chief of Naval Operations before becoming president of the Naval War College in Newport, R.I., where he enlivened the curriculum. He commanded the U.S. Second Fleet after departing the War College.

Admiral Turner's career has been wholly in the period of American-Soviet

arms competition. He is as appreciative as any other senior U.S. military officer of the magnitude of the Russian military challenge and wary of simplistic conclusions about its meaning. His capacity for untangling complexities is exhibited in an essay published in the January issue of Foreign Affairs magazine in which he expresses concern over the Soviet Navy's expanding threat to the U.S. Navy's sea-control mission.

There is no easy answer, Admiral Turner argues in Foreign Affairs, to the question of which superpower is stronger at sea. He discusses the range of Naval missions, assesses American assets and deficits, and concludes that "the U.S. Navy can still successfully assert sea control; but in areas where the enemy can concentrate we must allocate a higher percentage of our total forces than before, almost always include an aircraft carrier, depend more and more on tactical initiative, and accept a higher risk."

Admiral Turner is eminently fitted for the post of CIA Director. He's learned and experienced in strategic affairs. He is sophisticated in intelligence matters. Mr. Carter has chosen well.